

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE COUNTERFEITER'S GOLD TOOTH

OR NICK CARTER'S CROOKED CORRESPONDENT

J. N. KEEL'S
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BY THE AUTHOR
OF NICK CARTER

BEFORE NICK COULD FREE HIMSELF, A DARK PIT YAWNED AT HIS FEET.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

—FROM—
J. N. KEEL'S
NEWS DESK
OCT 10 1900

CHAPTER I.

THE FINGER-PRINTS ON A CIGAR BOX.

"Hold on, young man; you are my prisoner!"

The abrupt, ominous command instantly checked the headlong rush of passengers toward the N. Y. & N. H. express, as the long train stood in the station at Stamford on its incoming trip.

At the very moment the conductor's "all aboard!" rang out, a blue-coated official pushed his way through the jostling throng, until he brought his heavy hand down smartly upon the shoulder of a young man in the van of the crowd, with the startling order quoted.

In his excitement the individual in question tried to wrench himself clear, exclaiming:

"Let me go! I must not miss this train. It is moving. Stand back, or——"

Just then he was nearly hurled from his feet, and pulled furiously backward, while the sharp scream of a woman's voice rang above the confusion of the scene.

At this very moment Nick Carter, the great New York detective, was turning away from the telegraph office, with a dispatch in his hand reading:

"Look sharp for a tall young man, with close-cut hair, smooth face, dark-brown eyes, and with the air of a sporting man. When last seen he wore a dark-gray suit and a

plug hat. He is about twenty-four, and he comes from Fairfield. He is known among his associates as Curt Smart. He shoved the queer at Bridgeport."

Nick had left his home the day before, at the request of Chief Hazen, to track down the perpetrators of one of the most baffling conspiracies that has ever troubled the United States Government.

It was nothing less than a bold scheme of counterfeiting Uncle Sam's legal tender. Nothing like it had been known since the days when Brockway and "Tom" Ballard sent out their spurious United States bonds and railroad securities, in such perfect imitations of the originals that bankers and brokers were purchasing them on every hand without dreaming of their utter worthlessness.

Nick had barely scanned the hasty message as the officer's command, followed by the voice with womanly sharpness in it, suddenly stopped the hum of all other voices.

Then the momentary lull that fell on the scene was broken by the voice of the impatient conductor, as he repeated:

"All aboard!"

Those who were obliged to take the train started up the steps reluctantly, while the officer continued to move away with his charge, the woman keeping beside him and his prisoner.

Nick saw at a glance that the arrested man was the identical person he had been telegraphed to stop.

The woman, or, more strictly speaking, the girl, for she could not have been over seventeen, possessed rare beauty of the blonde type.

She was weeping and wringing her hands, while she appealed to the officer to release her friend.

As if to add to the dramatic excitement of the situation, a second official ran forward at this moment, exclaiming to the first:

"Egad, Thompson! I guess I'll have a hand in this game. I have just got word to stop this girl! She's old Stowell's daughter, at Kent, and she was running away with this precious scamp."

The girl's screams were redoubled as he seized her in no easy grasp and proceeded to pull her away in an opposite direction.

But she resisted so furiously that he lost his hold, when she darted back to the side of the young man.

"You can't take me away, and you sha'n't!" she cried. "We have done nothing wrong."

"The she-cat!" exclaimed the officer, repeating his attack. "Come with me, Miss Stowell; you shall not be hurt. My orders are to hold you until your father gets here."

"But what means this arrest of Mr. Smart?" she demanded, suddenly checking her flow of tears and looking defiantly at the officer.

"He has been passing counterfeit money, miss. You don't want anything to do with him."

"He hasn't!" she cried, sharply. "Curt Smart is honest."

By this time the train was moving out of the station, and the officers had taken their charges out of each other's sight, the crowd that had witnessed the scene beginning to scatter.

Nick followed the course taken by the officer and his prisoner, though he made no attempt to keep close to them.

When he reached the police station, he found that several of the officials had collected about the place, discussing the newcomer, who had been taken to a cell.

"There doesn't seem to be any of the queer in his pocket-book," said the chief, who was examining the personal property just taken from the prisoner. "I wonder what is in this box?" he continued, taking up a small parcel the young man had had in his hands at the time of his capture.

Tearing away the paper wrapped carefully about the object, it was found to be a common cigar box of the small size.

A moment later an exclamation of surprise escaped the chief's lips, as he raised the cover of the box.

"By the great dominion, boys! Look here! See the wealth the fellow had," pointing to a large pile of United States Treasury notes.

"All ten-dollar bills, and there is more than a hundred of them! But every one is counterfeit. I call that a streak of luck in catching the chap so easily."

"Let me look at the box, chief," said Nick, who had gained a place by the speaker's side.

"Hilloa, Nick! this you? How is it you are always on hand on occasions like this?"

"It is my business," was the quiet reply, as the great detective took the box.

"I can't say I admire the fellow's choice for cigars any more than I do for his money."

"Can I see you alone a moment, chief?"

"Certainly," replied the officer, evidently surprised by the request. "I will take care of this property, boys; you know it will all be needed at the trial."

"Do you know anything of this young Smart?" asked Nick, as soon as he was closeted with Chief Duggan.

"Enough to send him to State prison for the best part of his life."

"I didn't mean that. How came you to have him arrested?"

"Why, he was eloping with old man Stowell's only daughter. Then, no sooner had we got word to stop him than word came that he had been shoving the queer at Bridgeport. If that isn't enough, I should like to know what is."

"Say, old man, I hope you don't feel bad because we got in ahead and scooped the man. I suppose you were down here for just that purpose. Ha, ha! was that the first time you ever got in second?"

"Have you examined the notes sufficiently to know that they are of the denomination now flooding the country?"

"See for yourself."

A swift examination of the forged bills showed that they were all counterfeit of the United States Treasury notes of the series of 1880, check letter B, head of Daniel Webster, plate number 2250, signed by W. S. Rosencrans, Register, and J. W. Hyatt, Treasurer.

"Isn't that a boss counterfeit?" asked the chief. "See what a perfect imitation of silk-fibre paper, while the whole imprint is so perfect as to deceive almost any one but an expert."

"All the same denomination," said Nick.

As Nick lifted up the pile, a small piece of paper fell from the lot and fluttered down to the floor.

"Whew! what is that?" asked the chief.

"It is a section of a bill, which has been torn from the rest. It belonged to a good note, but of the same series as the forged ones."

"Perhaps the rest is there."

"I hardly think so."

As Nick spoke, he scrutinized the half bill closely. It had not been torn, as he had thought at first, but had been cut in a peculiar zig-zag fashion by some sharp instrument with teeth like a saw.

As he recognized this fact, he said to himself, with inward satisfaction, not a hint of which, however, appeared in his expression of countenance.

"I thought so. It is the same old gang, and this half bill is their means of identifica-

tion. I thought that confession of Jim Crawford would be useful some day."

Then, turning to the chief, he remarked, quietly:

"If you have no objection, I would like to keep this."

"Certainly. Is it possible you think of looking further for the gang?"

Nick was turning the cigar box back and forth between his hands, and, after a moment's pause, he answered this question by another.

"Have you noticed this cigar box carefully?"

"Yes. It is the Star brand of cigars—five-centers, and poor ones at that. For some reason, the Government stamp has been scraped off."

"Did you see anything worthy of note about the wrapper?"

"Didn't think to look at it. Hullo! as I live! Here is an address written in a fine hand upon the wrapper with a lead pencil: Mrs. Scott Burrows, No. 17 Ann street, New York."

"Correct. Better keep that wrapper. Now, I wish you would take me to the best photographer in town. I want a picture of this box."

"Have the box if you want it, as soon as it has been shown in court."

"I don't care for it," replied Nick, who had been examining one of its sides through a magnifying-glass.

"I am afraid your eyes are not as sharp as

you think they are, chief, or you would have seen the finger-prints made by him who held it in his hand before the cover was wrapped around it."

"Finger-prints! By the great dominion, Nick Carter, you are right. Mighty strange I did not think to look for them. But they don't show up plain enough for every one to see."

Then the chief gave Nick a sudden look of intelligence.

"By Jove! I believe you have some trick afoot in getting that photographed."

Nick made no reply to this, and a few minutes later they had reached the studio of a reputable photographer.

"I want this side of the box 'taken' under the strongest light possible," said Nick, placing the object in the position he wanted it to stand.

When the photographer had obtained a perfect negative, the great detective handed the box back to the chief, saying:

"I have no further use for it, Duggan. I advise you to keep it with as little handling as possible."

Turning to the photographer, Nick said:

"I want that photo enlarged as many times as it is necessary to bring out each line distinctly, Mr. Terrace. I will call for it to-morrow."

"Now, chief, I would like to visit the prisoner in company with Lawyer Butterworth."

"All right, Nick. But I am going to tell you, if you think to clear that rascal you

have got the hardest case on your hands you ever undertook."

"I am after the truth, that is all. I wish to tell you, however, that I have already more proof toward clearing Curtis Smart than you have against him."

"But I am in luck, for there comes Mr. Butterworth now, and I will pay my respects to the prisoner at once."

CHAPTER II.

WHAT WAS THE NUMBER.

Nick and his companion were given a hearty reception by the prisoner, who looked upon their coming as a ray of hope.

"What have they done with her—Miss Stowell?" were almost his first words.

"She is safe. You have more reason to think of yourself just now. You are in a bad fix."

"Am I? But I am innocent. I did not know it was a bad bill. I got it in payment of a debt from a man in Fairfield. It was Mr. Durgin."

"But the box?" said Nick.

"Oh! I had forgotten that. It was given to me by a man on the train."

"Under what circumstances?"

"I was passing from one car to another, when I met a stranger who asked me if I was going to New York. When I told him I expected to, he asked me to do an errand for him."

"Then he took that box from under his

coat, and asked me to deliver it as addressed."

"What was the address?"

"I did not read the name. The wind was blowing hard, and I was anxious to get into the car. I thought it was rather a strange request, but I took the box, told him I would deliver it, and passed on."

"Was Miss Stowell with you?"

"No, sir. You see, I had left her in the other car to go into the smoker. I have that bad habit, but God knows I never tried to cheat any one."

"So there was no witness to the meeting between you and this stranger?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Did he pass on into the car you had left?"

"I cannot tell; I left him standing on the platform."

"You did not see him afterward?"

"No, sir."

"Describe him."

"As near as I can tell from the hasty glance I gave him, he was nearly six feet tall, wore dark whiskers, had glasses on, and a glove on one hand. I noticed the other hand particularly, as it was too white for a man who worked out of doors for a living. He had on a black frock-coat, and looked like a gentleman."

"Is that all you know about the box?"

"Yes, sir. Is there anything wrong about it?"

"You ought to know. Please hold out

your right hand, Mr. Smart, so that I can see the inside."

The prisoner did as he was requested without hesitation.

"That is sufficient. What has been your business?"

"I have worked in the hat shops of Danbury. I am a curler."

"You were eloping with Squire Stowell's daughter?"

"You might call it that, sir. It is on her account I feel worse that this has happened."

"What has been done with her?"

"She is in good hands. I think her father is expected to come and take her home."

"He can't come, sir; he is sick in bed. Oh, that I should get into this awkward scrape at this time of all others! Do you think they will keep me long?"

"Mr. Butterworth will talk with you further, if you desire. My advice is to tell the truth and stick to it."

Leaving Lawyer Butterworth still talking with the prisoner, Nick started away.

He was an excellent judge of character, as we know, and he had been very favorably impressed by young Smart.

After his talk with him, Nick came to the conclusion that in all probability the prisoner was speaking the truth, and he was pretty well convinced that he was innocent of the crime charged against him.

The great detective returned to the police station, and he had hardly entered the outer

office when the chief came hastily forward to meet him.

"Just in time," he said, and drew the detective into his private room.

"It seems as if there was no end to this counterfeiting business to-day. A stranger was brought to the station inquiring for you. I told him I would hunt you up. The fellow is badly used up, and, though I have had the doctors fix him up as best they could, they say he can't live long. He has something he wants to say, and it's about counterfeiters. But I wouldn't let a soul near him but you.

"Here we are. You will find him lying on that couch."

Nick saw in the farther corner of the room a huddled figure, and the groans of one in great distress came to his ears.

"Here is the man for whom you were asking," said Duggan, bending over the sufferer.

"Nick Carter?"

"Yes, Nick Carter."

"I had rather see him than any other man in the world. But I'm afraid it's too late."

"What have you to say?" asked Nick, approaching the man, whom he did not recognize.

The man glanced at the chief.

"I would rather see you alone," he said, faintly, to Nick.

Chief Duggan caught the words, made a gesture of acquiescence, and left the room.

"It's about that Cash Brazen—dum him!" exclaimed the unknown.

"Cash Brazen?"

"Yes, the head of the counterfeiting gang. Oh! I was one of them."

"Well?"

"He cheated me out of my share. And when I kicked and threatened to expose them—more fool I—he attacked me, in the street, as I was going home. He's done for me—killed me—at least he's fixed me so I'm here."

"Who brought you here?"

"A policeman—who found me—lying on the sidewalk half conscious. I asked to be brought here—to find you—to—to get even with him—before I die. I—I——"

A fit of coughing stopped further articulation for several minutes.

Nick could not help seeing that the man's career was nearly ended.

"Speak lively, man, whatever you have to say."

"You hev been a long time a-comin'—too long fer me. I've 'bout spun my thread. Put yer hand in my vest-pocket—t'other one. Ye'll find a bit o' paper there. Got it?"

Nick's fingers had closed on something, and, as he opened his hand, he beheld a half of a ten-dollar Treasury note, cut in the same identical way as was the one he had found in the cigar box of counterfeit money.

"Is that all?" asked Nick.

"No. I've got something to say about that. How my throat fills up."

He paused a moment in evident pain, and then continued:

"That piece of a note you have taken from my pocket is the token, the pass-word, so to speak, of one of the worst gangs of counterfeiters in this country since the days of Tom Ballard and Jim Brockway, who was my cousin.

"Oh, I ain't any chicken myself, but that Cash Brazen is the worst cuss as hoofs it—he an' Bill Swazey. I'm givin' it to you straight now.

"Them two can make money faster than Uncle Sam, an' it goes, too!"

"Where are they located?"

"I'm coming to that, only give me time.

"As I was saying, this torn note is the company's token. It is used as a species of identification, not only among ourselves, but also among the shovers of the queer. One-half was given to me, and Bill had one. And Turner—he was the engraver—used to work for the Government—he had another, and Cash Brazen kept one for himself.

"Don't know what has become of Turner. It'd be just like Cash to knock him out when he had got through with him, same's he did me. But he ain't any worse'n Bill Swazey. I told Bill I'd get even with them if they ever played foul with me. I will."

"Where is this Cash Brazen?" asked Nick, who feared every word would be the man's last.

"He ain't called that now. He's too cunnin', Cash is. Bill has an every-day name, too. But you would know him at sight. Plays the fiddle like fun. Plays

'Dan Tucker' for all he's worth—always doin' it. But I'll get even with them both, an' I want you to find them. You promise that?"

"Yes; but you are losing valuable time. Finish your story before it is too late."

A furious fit of coughing again stopped the stranger's words, so it seemed a long time before he resumed.

"I am givin' ye this straight. I—oh, I believe I am chokin' to death! I am dyin'!"

Nick lifted the man so he was more comfortable.

But it was evident his moments were numbered. His next words showed that his mind was wandering.

"I swore that I would get even with you, Cash, and Joe Brockway never eats his words. Look out for him, Nick Carter!" he added, suddenly changing his manner. "Cash Brazen boasts that no man can match him. He is the devil himself. Bill Swazey isn't slow. You will know him by his fiddle. Plays 'Dan Tucker' like lightning!"

Here the speaker ended with incoherent cries, while he thrashed the air with his arms.

Then he became more quiet, and resumed, in a lower tone:

"It is growing dark, Nick Carter. Come nearer—nearer! I cannot see you."

"Where does Cash Brazen live?" asked Nick, almost fiercely.

"New York—West Nineteenth, No.—"

He paused, and then, growing wilder again, he cried:

"It was a great scheme—a million dollars—the torn bank-note—the tomb—the watch-word—plays 'Dan Tucker' like lightning—my revenge, Bill Cash—it is over at last!"

The lips ceased to move, while the man fell back as motionless as a wooden figure.

He was dead.

"West Nineteenth street," murmured the detective; "but what number?"

Nick lifted the right arm, to look at the palm of the hand and the inside of the fingers.

"There is no scar," he murmured, as he let the limp limb fall back upon the body.

There was nothing more to be learned here, and he returned to the chief's office.

CHAPTER III.

THE Y-SHAPED SCAR.

Just as he entered the room, he heard the startling exclamation:

"You are accused of a serious crime. I must hold you until I can learn more about you."

Instantly the hum of voices and shuffling of feet ceased, and a death-like silence fell upon the scene.

Nick paused quietly and surveyed the scene.

The speaker was Chief Duggan.

He had addressed his words to a tall, farmer-looking man of apparently fifty years of age, with gray hair and whiskers, and a decidedly sanctimonious expression on his handsome features.

A pallor came over his countenance now, and his voice trembled as he said:

"Hold me? Impossible! What have you against me?"

"A man was stabbed on the street, and you were seen coming away from the place where he was attacked. You were the only man on the block when the policeman ran forward at the man's cry."

"Lord bless me! Do I look like a murderer? Why, my son, I am a peaceful, law-abiding citizen, as I can easily prove to you. Why, I am deacon of the Baptist church at Cornwall, as you can find out by asking any one there."

"My name is Alanson Honeywell, and I was sent down here by Squire Stowell to fetch home his daughter, who ran off with that scamp of a Smart. The squire was too sick to come himself."

There was an apparent honesty in the speaker's tone, while he seemed greatly affected by his situation.

Chief Duggan looked puzzled, as the troubled deacon began to walk excitedly about the room.

There was really nothing against the man except his proximity to the place of attack.

"Calm yourself, my man. Everything may be as you say, but I feel it a duty to keep you here until I can learn that you are the person you claim to be."

"It shall cost you dear if you detain me."

"Hilloa! I'm in luck. Here comes Mr."

Butterworth, and he knows me like an open Bible.

"I never was so glad to see you in my life, John. The fact is, I have got into a little misunderstanding—that is, these gentlemen are slightly mistaken."

"What, deacon! this you? What has brought you down here?"

"Squire Stowell sent me after his girl. That is, I was coming as far as Norwalk, and as he was too sick to leave his bed, he wanted me to look up that runaway girl of his. Oh, dear! these girls!"

At this juncture the bewildered chief called the lawyer aside.

"Do you know that man?"

"Yes; he is Alanson Honeywell, of Cornwall, this State."

"Then he is what he represents himself to be?"

"He is a deacon of the church in good standing. I know nothing against him."

"Then you vouch for him?"

"Most certainly. What is the trouble?"

In a few words Chief Duggan made the situation clear to the lawyer.

Mr. Butterworth expressed his amazement, and was loud in his assertions of the farmer's innocence.

Chief Duggan finally decided to let the deacon go, if the lawyer would vouch for his appearance should he be needed.

This Mr. Butterworth willingly consented to do.

As Nick Carter heard this arrangement, he

made a movement as if he would interrupt, but thinking better of it, resumed his careless attitude.

Neither the chief nor Mr. Butterworth would have been flattered could they have known the detective's opinion of their astuteness.

Deacon Honeywell, with profuse expressions of gratitude, took his departure.

Nick then advanced to the chief's desk.

"Learn anything of importance?" asked Duggan, quickly.

"Nothing complete. He was too far gone to hold up long enough to tell what he wanted to."

"Did he implicate Curt Smart?"

"In no way."

"You must stay to the examination, Nick."

"I shall try to, though just now you will have to excuse me, as I must send a message to my assistant in New York."

Nick then hastened to the telegraph office, thinking:

"I must find out more about that Deacon Honeywell. Brockway is another link in the chain. I must get Chick to work as soon as possible. We must find out the number. But how? Ah, I have it! A personal in the *Herald* may catch him."

A full and explicit telegram, in cipher, was sent to Chick.

From the telegraph office Nick went to the photographer's.

"I have brought out those fingers most remarkably," said Mr. Terrace, "all except

the ball of the middle finger. There seems to be a blur there."

"It is well done," declared Nick, as he examined the photograph. "I could ask for nothing better. How much is your bill?"

"I shall make no charge for that, sir. The satisfaction of doing it is sufficient. I am sorry about that imperfection, and I will try again if you say so."

"No need of it. That place is no fault of yours. I would not have it off for a hundred dollars. It was a scar on the finger."

"Well! well! why hadn't I thought of that? Let me see that again, please. It is the shape of the letter Y. How plain I see it now."

"Enough to convict somebody," thought Nick, as he hurried away from the photographer.

He had resolved to remain in Stamford until after the examination of young Smart, to improve his leisure in looking the town over.

The following morning Nick received a New York newspaper containing among the personals a notice which seemed to interest him exceedingly.

The advertisement simply asked for any person who wished to invest in a money-making scheme to correspond with the undersigned. The advertisement was worded in a way to attract the attention of unscrupulous sharpers.

Following the announcement were the letters, in small type, "a. s."

"Chick has begun operations. Now for Mr. Smart's examination."

As Nick had expected, at this preliminary trial nothing new was developed.

Curtis Smart told his story in a straightforward manner substantially as he had given it to the detective.

The case was so strong against him that he was indicted and bound over to appear at the higher court.

With small hope of being able to furnish bonds, the prisoner was completely prostrated by the thoughts of his situation.

That evening there appeared an advertisement in the same paper Chick had used for his personal, and worded in a way which told plainly enough to him who understood such methods that it was a reply to the other.

The next morning brought a bulky letter from Chick, containing several answers which had come to the advertisement.

Among them was one saying:

"What is your scheme? Address A. B., 919 West 19th street."

Nick, as he read this, gave a chuckle of delight.

The plan had worked.

At once the great detective decided to take the next train for New York.

Without delay he bent his steps toward the station, reaching it just as the express came to a stand-still.

There were an unusual number of cars on this morning, and Nick was nearing the end of the train when his attention was attracted

by the appearance of a man sitting at one of the windows.

Any other person might have passed this stranger without a second look, but something in his general appearance caused Nick Carter to give a more searching gaze, though he did not stop his advance.

Like himself, the man seemed to have eyes for everything around him, and as his keen, gray orbs of vision for a moment rested on him, the great detective felt a thrill of interest awakened, as he said to himself.

"I have seen those eyes before!"

The stranger's features were regular and clear-cut, with a skin of remarkable purity.

The lower part of the face was hidden by a heavy, jet-black beard, parted with mathematical precision on the chin, and a long, drooping mustache of a slightly lighter hue.

He was dressed faultlessly.

A coat of speckless broadcloth, a shirt front of immaculate whiteness, a spotless collar and cravat adjusted with scrupulous care, each and all vied with the general neatness of his personal appearance.

The only exception was the unmistakable tilt given to his hat, which was encircled with a wide band of crape.

Despite all the rest, this hat, with the steely glitter of his cold, gray eyes, gave him a rakish appearance.

As Nick was passing, the stranger deftly removed his hat, and began to flick away some imaginary spots of dirt with his bare, white hand.

On the third finger Nick saw the gleam of a sparkling diamond ring.

On the inside of the middle finger of the right hand he saw what interested him just then more than a thousand rings could have done.

It was the Y-shaped scar, of which he carried a photograph in his pocket!

The train was already moving out of the station.

There was no time for further reflection.

To avoid the notice of the other, Nick made no move to gain the steps, but waiting until the last coach had passed him, he leaped down upon the track behind it, and, catching upon the railing on the side away from the platform, swung himself upon the moving car.

CHAPTER IV.

CASH BRAZEN'S DOUBLE.

Knowing the train, which was an express, would not stop before reaching Greenwich, Nick entered the car behind that containing the man with the Y-shaped scar, and apparently gave his undivided attention to the newspaper he took from his pocket.

The hunted man did not alight at Greenwich, but remained unconcerned in his seat until the Grand Central station was reached.

Even then he showed none of the haste of his fellow-passengers in rushing out, but calmly waited till the jostle was over, when he leisurely descended the steps.

Nick was already on the platform, in readiness for his man.

He had expected the person would take a carriage of some sort, but to his surprise he did not.

Instead he walked complacently out of the station, and proceeded leisurely along Forty-second street.

Graduating his gait to that of the other, Nick followed silently and cautiously on his heels.

Reaching the elevated station, he mounted the stairs, Nick still following.

Both entered the first down train.

At Eighteenth street the stranger got out. Nick, needless to say, did likewise.

The man turned into Nineteenth street, and the detective, at a discreet distance, still kept him in sight.

Finally the stranger ascended the stone steps of a fine-looking residence, and, without stopping to touch the bell, entered the building.

Nick sauntered slowly past, glancing up as he did so.

"By Jove!"

This mental exclamation was called forth by the fact that the house bore the number 919.

He thought best to wait until evening before pursuing his investigations further, as it was just possible the man had observed he was followed. So Nick went to his office, had a long interview with Chick, and that evening was once more at No. 919.

He saw a glistening plate bearing the name of Merrymount upon the door; gave a vigorous pull at the bell, and, in answer to the colored porter's query, he inquired for that gentleman.

"He has just returned from a visit in the country, sah. Who shall I tell him wishes to see him?"

"Mr. Bondman, the broker. Sorry I have lost my last card. Please tell him my business is urgent."

"Yes, sah."

In a short time the man returned, and motioned Nick to follow him.

The house was furnished in an elegant style, the soft, heavy carpet giving back no sound of a footfall. In fact, an unnatural silence seemed to hang over the abode.

When Nick had been escorted into the sitting-room and told to be seated, almost any other man would have been taken by surprise at the swift, silent approach of the man he had expected to meet.

"Bondman, the broker, if I understood my man aright?" he said, extending a white, shapely hand as he advanced to the detective's side. "To what am I indebted for this visit?"

His lips were parted with a smile, showing between the ebony shades of the mustache and beard two rows of pearly white teeth, looking the whiter for their dark setting.

In the midst of the lines of gleaming ivory Nick saw a spot of matchless yellow.

It was a gold tooth in the middle of its perfect companions.

"It is business of the utmost importance, Mr. Merrymount," said Nick, as he took the proffered hand.

He improved the opportunity to look for the Y-shaped scar.

It was not there!

"He is not the man I tracked this afternoon!" flashed through Nick's mind. "But he is worth as much to me."

Any other one must have failed to have seen the difference between this cool, suave, dark-looking, rakish-appearing man and him of the scarred finger.

The beard was of the same hue, and parted with the same exactness; the eyes were identical, and the clothes were of similar style.

All this and much more Nick saw at a glance, as he replied:

"I have come in regard to an advertisement in the *Herald*, and which some one in this house answered."

The stranger gave him one quick, keen glance.

"I answered that advertisement," he said, quietly. "Well?"

"I am in search of a cool, level-headed man to undertake with me one of the greatest schemes of speculation that ever entered the mind of man. I think you are the one to carry it out."

"Don't think that I am a madman, but I have learned to study men in my day. I have been in situations where this came in

very handy," saying this in a tone and with a look which was intended to convey a meaning likely to find an affinity with the thoughts of him he was addressing.

Nick saw that the words were not without their effect.

"What is your scheme?"

"In the first place," replied Nick, "I want to tell you that I have been a great traveler in my day. Part of the time I have traveled for pleasure and observation, and if I have done a little globe trotting on account of necessity, why, it's nobody's business, is it?" looking the other in the face.

"Of course not; go on," replied the sharper, who showed that he was both puzzled and pleased by the appearance of this strange caller.

"Well, as I started to say, in my wanderings—no matter where just now—I struck upon the fairest spot on earth! Of course, I expect you will take exceptions to this, until you have seen it. Then you will go into ecstasy over it as I have done."

"Now I have got the title deed for this Eden. I had to do a little nervy figuring to get this, but that's neither here nor there. In the fight for the almighty dollar I calculate men don't always stand for trifles and mustn't be too particular."

"Go on," said the other, impatiently.

"But look here!" suddenly exclaimed Nick, casting a cautious glance about the room, "are you sure we shall not be interrupted. I don't like to talk to too large an audience."

"No danger of that here," replied the sharper; "I know who is in my own house. But if you wish we can go into my private apartment."

With these words he arose and led the way to a smaller and less elegantly furnished room, followed by Nick.

"I feel freer here," he said, with a long-drawn breath.

Then, as he sank into the seat pointed out by the other, he continued:

"My scheme has millions in it, only it takes a few thousand to begin. It could not fail, with you and I to manage it."

The other remained silent, while he toyed with the ring on his finger, and continued to watch his visitor.

As Nick paused for a moment, a faint tapping, like some one striking the end of his finger on a window-pane, reached his ear.

His companion did not seem to notice it, while he waited impatiently for Nick to resume.

But the keen sense of the detective's hearing had noticed a singular uniformity in the succession of taps, one after another, until he recognized in them the code of telegraphy made up of the dots and dashes used in transmitting messages.

He soon spelled out one word:

"Help!"

"Before I betray myself," he resumed, with apparent caution. "I must know that you will swear eternal secrecy to what I am going to divulge."

As he spoke, Nick began to tap carelessly upon the table, while he listened to a repetition of the sounds that seemed to come from below him.

"Do I look like a man who would betray a trust?" demanded his companion, sharply. "Have done with this fooling. No man ever played with me."

"Nor me!" gritted Nick, from between his clinched teeth, at the same time tapping upon a glass paper-weight near at hand after the following manner: One quick, short rap, two longer and heavier taps, succeeded by a short pause; then four short raps in rapid succession, and a stop; again two short taps, the whole meaning:

"Who?"

"There are diamonds in my scheme—untold wealth for him who has the nerve to carry it through," said Nick, without waiting for the reply to his secret message. "I spoke of my Eden; that is a great thing, but I have something far better—more ready money in it."

In a whisper, he added:

"I have the secret to manufacture diamonds at my will. Only I need some——"

"Bah!" exclaimed his companion, springing to his feet. "I know of a secret worth more than that."

"My scheme is money itself!"

Nick opened wide his eyes in feigned wonder.

The tapping was still continuing, but sim-

ply repeating the same supplication as at first. No reply to his query.

"Yes," went on the man. "I think you have the nerve to carry it through."

"Try me, if there is the ring of the dollars in it."

"There may not be their ring, but their softer touch, worth none the less because not heard."

By this time Nick was upon his feet.

"Show them!" he said, hoarsely.

"Just wait here a minute; I won't be gone long. I will show you something that will make your eyes snap."

With these words the other left the room with his cat-like steps.

No sooner was he alone than Nick set about to solve the mystery of the rapping.

He had fancied that it was communicated by the wall behind him.

In a moment he was sounding the partition with his fist.

He had not struck half a dozen light blows before he was rewarded by a ring which told that he had hit upon iron and that behind it was a vacant space.

In an instant the tapping blow was repeated.

Nick quickly asked his question again, and in a moment came the reply:

"Turner!"

"The engraver?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"A friend. What is the trouble?"

In reply Nick made out:

"Bound—iron cage—dying—Cash Brazen!"

More was following, which Nick checked with a warning tap, while he resumed his seat just as Cash Brazen, as he had learned to consider his host, re-entered the room.

"What do you think of that?" asked the man, laying a ten-dollar Treasury note on the table.

It was the identical counterfeit of the gang Nick was hunting down.

He took the note, to give it a critical examination, saying when he had finished:

"Capital! I see but one fault."

"What?" demanded the owner, parting his lips in a sardonic smile, displaying two full rows of gleaming ivory.

Nick missed the gold tooth!

This man was not the one he had previously talked with!

He looked at the hand, and as it was lifted up he saw there on the middle finger the Y-shaped scar!

Otherwise there was no difference in the appearance of the two.

Had Cash Brazen a counterfeit self like the money he was making?

"There ought to be others to keep it company," Nick replied.

"There shall be company enough if you have the nerve to want it."

"Try me," was Nick's simple reply.

"You'll do. Isn't that a beauty!" smoothing out the bogus bill on the table. "We had an engraver who knew his biz."

"It beats all I ever saw," said Nick, in apparent admiration of the note. "I don't see how you got hold of such paper; I couldn't."

"That's my secret. There is no one to tell, either. How much do you want?"

Nick counted out a hundred dollars in good money, saying:

"That is as deep as I can go to-day; but I suppose you will let me have another opportunity? How much for that?"

"Three for one. Rather better than your scheme, eh?"

"Easier to get at. But I don't give mine up yet. Still I have another worth a hundred of them both."

"Another?" exclaimed the man, showing that Nick's earnestness had not been lost upon him. "Name it."

"Before I do it, I want to let you know that I am sharper than you give me credit for."

"You are not the man I talked with a minute ago!"

The counterfeiter half sprang to his feet, but sank back again at sight of the weapon in Nick's hand.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

"Your master, sir. Sit still! Are you willing to go with me peacefully, or shall I be obliged to overpower you?"

"What does this mean? I will call for help!"

"It will do no good. It would only make it so much the worse for you."

"But if I should call upon my brother?"

"It would be useless. I waited until he had left the house."

"How do you know he has left the house?"

"Caught a glimpse of his back as you came through the door. He had his hat on then. Heard the outside door open and close immediately after that. He is well on his way by this time."

The counterfeiter turned pale, for if Nick had spoken in part at random he had hit the truth.

"Man or devil, who are you?"

"You can select your own answer. But I cannot give you much time. Are——"

"My heaven! I see now! What a blind bat I have been! You are Nick Carter!"

"What if I am?"

"I told Cash to look out for you. Our jig is up."

"I am glad you are so sensible in your conclusions. I trust you will——"

"By heavens!" exclaimed the counterfeiter suddenly, "my capture shall not jeopardize the rest. Take me, Nick Carter; but I warn you that it will be the dearest job you ever did. The Brazen boys die game."

"Lead the way," said Nick, pointing to the door with his left hand.

Brazen arose as if to obey.

At his first step, however, he tripped and staggered forward toward Nick, flinging up his arms as he did so.

The next instant he caught at the detective, crying:

"I'll show you who is master, Nick Carter!"

It was a sorry moment for him when he did, however.

The Little Giant met him midway.

The desperado suddenly felt himself lifted from his feet.

It seemed as if a thunderbolt had hit him.

Innumerable stars danced before his bewildered vision.

Then he was dashed upon the floor with a force that made him ache in every joint.

"Will you come peacefully, or shall I be obliged to handcuff you?"

"I will come peacefully. You have outwitted me, Nick Carter, and I deserve to pay for my foolishness.

"After all, I defy you to prove more than five years against me. I can afford that time at my age."

CHAPTER V.

PLAYING "DAN TUCKER!"

Nick had no further difficulty in taking his prisoner to the police headquarters, where he was received with due amazement.

In answer to the many questions with which he was plied, he had but one answer:

"Hold fast to your man, and keep silent until I have got the rest. Above all things, don't bring him into court until I tell you."

With this caution Nick asked for a couple of officers from the chief, when the three repaired to the whilom residence of "John Mer-

rymount," to look for the imprisoned engraver, Turner.

They found the house in charge of half a dozen frightened servants, as Nick had ascertained before leaving that these simple folks knew nothing of a prisoner in the house.

Nor did they know the real character of their master.

Nick at once went to the room where he had captured the counterfeiter, and began again the tapping on the wall.

But he failed to get any reply.

After a short examination of the place, he found a sort of sliding panel, fitted in so nicely as to defy notice on the part of the casual observer.

Pressing this aside, he found a wide cavity leading down to the basement, all of the sides being made of heavy sheet iron.

Knowing there must be some way to reach the bottom, Nick soon led the way to the basement.

There, in an iron pen, bound and gagged, they found the unconscious Turner.

Upon carrying him to the next story he showed signs of returning consciousness, though it was evident it would be a long time before he would be able to explain how he had come in that place.

But Nick had already an answer.

"He got tired of his companions, and they, fearing he would betray them, resolved to put him out of the way."

"But I see no sign of a counterfeiter's work about the place," said one of his companions.

"I did not expect you would.

"Cash Brazen has shown himself too shrewd to do that."

"Where shall we find them?"

"Perhaps this fellow will tell," said the third, indicating the prisoner.

"When the gang—all there are left of it—have had time to cover themselves," said Nick, disdainfully, and then added, with sudden resolution:

"Take this fellow into safe keeping. I am going on a little journey on my own hook."

Nick was at the Grand Central in season to take the three-twenty New Haven train.

"I must add the gold tooth to my collection of rarities," he mused, "and Deacon Honeywell will receive the surprise of his life."

At Bridgeport Nick changed to the Housatonic road, leaving the train at Cornwall.

He was disguised as a dust-covered, uncouth-looking specimen of that species of *genus homo*, the tramp.

The sun was sinking behind the highlands of the valley of the Hudson, as he started on foot along the hilly highway leading from the village of Cornwall to the adjoining town of Goshen.

He had not gone far before he was accosted by the driver of a raw-boned horse with the query:

"Hilloa, mister! want a lift!"

The speaker was a red-headed youth of seventeen or eighteen, with a thickly freckled face and a decided nasal drawl to his speech.

As he spoke he pulled up his ancient steed with an abruptness that nearly threw the creature into the ditch.

Looking up with affected indifference, Nick replied:

"Mebbe you can tell me where Deacon Honeywell lives?"

"I should smile," answered the youth, with a snicker, though what caused the laugh would have puzzled one to have told. "I'm going purty near past his house. Jump in."

Nick accepted the invitation without further delay.

"Lookin' for wuk?" asked the boy, as he whipped up the horse.

"Some."

"Deacon's a master hand to keep a parcel of men round him. Has a big farm."

"He's rich?"

"You bet. Just flings the money right round. Why, he almost built that new church you see at the village. The deacon's a buster."

"Great churchman?"

"Yes; he can pray the loudest and the longest of enny man in Cornwall. Fact! I heerd Squire Stowell say so."

"Stowell lives near here?"

"Just over the line in Kent.

"The squire's terrible done, too, on 'count his darter running off with that Curt Smart. Got him locked up down to Stamford for passing counterfeit money. Served him right, too. The deacon went arter her, and he brought her home, too.

"Gol dang the counterfeit money! Dad got tucked on a ten-spot. Leastways that's what he told me when I axed him for a bit. Them ten-spots are thicker round here than miskeeters.

"S'pose they'll stop now they hev got Curt?"

"Mebbe. How long has the deacon lived in this town?"

"Six or seven years. He bought the old Baxton farm. Fixed it up mightily. Well he might with all the help he has."

"Got any family?"

"Only a wife, an' I'll bet he didn't wish he had her. That is, most ennybody else would. The deacon never finds fault, they say. Hands all like him."

"What's the trouble with his wife?"

"Ain't just right in her upper story. B'lieve they lost a boy or girl, gol danged if I know which. It upset her. Never goes out enny into comp'ny.

"She has a funny notion of going to the cemetery of nights. Nothing but the deacon must harness up the hoss and take her down to the family tomb, where she will stay—the deacon only knows how long. Some of us boys watched 'em one night, and they didn't come out for more'n two hours. My! weren't the deacon hoppin' when he found out we'd watched 'em.

"There ain't menny men as would harness up at midnight just to take his wife to the grave-yard, is there? Gol dang it! dad just bangs round fit to kill if marm happens to ask him to git a pail of water arter dark. But the deacon's more religiouser 'n dad. I s'pose that makes the difference.

"Did you ever hev enny religion, mister?"

"None to hurt me as I knows on.

"I s'pose now the fall work is comin' on, the deacon will want more help?"

"Shouldn't be s'prised. But hold on! you said you wanted to see the deacon?"

"Yes."

"Ain't this Tuesday?"

"Yes."

"So I mapped it out. Wull, gol dang it! it's prayer meetin' night."

"What of it?"

"Why, if you want see the deacon you'll hev to go to Mister Golding's, where they's holdin' meetin'.

"You'll hev to git out up here to the corner. If you was goin' right to the deacon's house you would keep right on up the hill. I go purty near to the farm."

"I guess I'll go to the deacon's house, an' wait till he comes home."

"Mebbe thet would be best. Guess you wouldn't shine much in company. Git up, Duke! seems as if you was slower'n ever to-night."

Keeping up his course of questioning, Nick gleaned some interesting points in regard to Deacon Honeywell, though it was impossible to learn anything of his history prior to his advent into Cornwall.

"The deacon ain't much on spoutin' 'bout hisself enny. But here you are, as near as I am goin'. His house'n is up yender where you see that clump of maples. Gol danged purty place, an' sightly, too.

"No need of thanks, mister; hope you'll strike hold of some of the deacon's money. Good-night."

The farm-house designated was but a few rods away, and Nick climbed the hill with a

slow step, all the while studying his surroundings.

As the youth with the red head had said, it was a beautiful place, and it commanded a wide view of the adjoining country.

Though the night had fairly set in, it was light enough for him to see the church steeple in the distance, and around it the white walls and dark roofs of certain of the village houses.

Off to his right, and seen with more grew-some distinctness, he saw the large, old-fashioned looking cemetery where Deacon Honeywell was wont to make his nightly pilgrimages with his crazy wife.

The tall, marble grave-stones looked spectral in the distance.

The house belonging to the man he was hunting down was a two-story structure, with a long ell connecting it with a large barn and other outbuildings.

No light was burning at the homestead, and at first he was inclined to think that no one was at home.

But as he got nearer he discovered the figure of a man sitting upon the piazza that had been built to the south side of the main house.

"Good-evening," greeted Nick, as he neared the steps leading up to the front door.

"The evening is well enough," replied the man, without moving.

"Deacon Honeywell lives here?"

"Do you mean that for a question or a statement? If the last, you are right. But I should judge it was Selectman Goodwin that you want to see."

"I want to see Deacon Honeywell. I am after a job."

"What kind of a job do you want? I should judge it should be one without much work about it."

"Sho! mebbe you set yourself up as one of these fortin-tellers. I ain't enny gosling, I'd hev you know. I've knocked 'bout consider'ble in my day, an' I ain't through yet."

"Where's the deacon?"

"Gone to prayer-meeting. So's the rest of the boys."

"Sho! do 'em good, mebbe. 'Pears to me if I was left alone with such a fine house as this I'd hev a light."

"Who said I was alone?"

"Don't git ruckus, podner. The fac' you're settin' here 'lone in the dark made me think you were 'lone."

"I have always been able to take care of myself, and I think I shall be a while longer."

"A good bit, I daresay. If you don't kick me off, I'll tarry with you till the deacon comes."

To this cool speech the man made no reply, though he was still eyeing the newcomer closely.

Nick had seen that he was a smooth-faced man of about forty, of medium size, and with a close-knit frame, giving promise of great strength.

"What is your name?"

"I ain't perticular what you call me. I ain't half so perticular as some other folks are."

This was said in a tone which caused the man to utter a low whistle.

"Ever heard of Tom Ballard?"

This brought the man to his feet, but he quickly sank back into the chair.

"What has that got to do about you?"

"I'm his cousin! You can call me Bob Ballard, if you want to, though 'tain't alwus I own up to it."

At this the man rose and came over to where he was sitting.

Nick quietly took out of his vest-pocket the half bill he had taken from the dying counterfeiter, and held it carelessly between his thumb and forefinger so that the zig-zag edges showed distinctly.

The stranger started and gave Nick one long, keen glance.

Then he held out his hand, which the detective grasped.

"S'prised, podner, but glad to see you. So will Ca—— But, s'cuse me, my tongue's running away with my head."

Nick leaned forward and asked, with a suddenness which was startling:

"Say, who is this Deacon Honeywell?"

But the shot failed of its effect. The other was on his guard, at least so far as his tongue was concerned.

"Deacon Honeywell!" he echoed, manifesting some surprise. "Why, he's Deacon Honeywell, of course."

Nick did not press the question, but said, carelessly:

"Humph! Fancied he mought be one of us. Say, mebbe there's a mug of cider handy. Such a nice place as this must have plenty of good, ripe cider."

"Cider—here? Deacon Honeywell would never allow such a thing on this place."

"S'cuse me, I forgot the deacon was pious. Does he make his help go to prayer-meetin'

every night! Must be a hard man to work for."

"One of the best. Everybody round here swears by the deacon."

"Sho! What time will he be home?"

"About half-past nine or ten."

"And he goes out to ride with the ol' lady as soon as he gets home?"

"Seems to me you know an all-fired sight for your clothes!"

"Feller like me picks up a sight. You see, I improve all the time."

"Should say you did."

"Ever in Etaly?"

"No."

"I never was. Know where Tombigum is?"

"No."

"Funny; I don't. Never see ennybody that did."

"Haven't you got about through?"

"Purty near. Orful dry. Say, does the deacon 'low enny music on the place?"

"Supposing he does?"

"I feel just like whistling! I am the marster whistler you ever see. Hear me."

Thereupon Nick began to whistle "Dan Tucker" as if his life depended upon it.

This seemed to arouse the other, for he immediately began to pace back and forth on the piazza, until he exclaimed, finally:

"Stop! that is murder. It makes me sick to hear any one murder that song."

"Mebbe you can do it better. If you will, I will tell you a secret worth more'n ennything you ever heard of."

"Let me get my fiddle," cried the man, showing some excitement. "I'll show you something worth listening to."

As the speaker entered the house, Nick followed him in.

"Let's have a light. I do enjoy music if I can only hev a light to listen by."

Striking a match, the other lighted a kerosene lamp standing on a table near the centre of the room.

Nick saw that the apartment was furnished after the style of the country sitting-room of a well-to-do farmer.

In the midst of his examination his companion produced a battered violin, and without any preliminary "tuning up" struck into the tune "Dan Tucker," going through the strains with a rapidity worthy of Joe Brockway's description.

There was no further doubt about the identity of the man.

He was Bill Swazey, just as the detective had expected.

Nick Carter's plans were already laid.

He must effect the capture of this outlaw before the return of Deacon Honeywell, whom he no longer considered other than the terrible desperado Cash Brazen, for whom the Government officers were at that moment scouring the country in every direction.

"I'd give a hundred dollars if I could play like that!" exclaimed Nick, beginning to execute a double shuffle about the room.

"So you like my playing?" asked the man.

"It's bootiful! bootiful!" replied Nick, dancing around the floor, until he came close to the fiddler.

Then, throwing his strong arms about the surprised man, he said:

"Surrender, Bill Swazey! You are my prisoner."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOOR IN THE FLOOR.

The strain of "Dan Tucker" suddenly stopped, while the violin fell from the trapped man's grasp.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, as the detective's powerful arms tightened about him like a vise.

"Just what I say, Bill Swazey. You are my prisoner."

"I—I don't understand you. Don't grip me so; you'll break every rib in my body. Who are you? Help!"

"Not a word. I have friends near, waiting my signal to come to my assistance. For the last time, I ask you to give up with——"

Beginning to realize his true situation, Swazey made a wild attempt to break away from his captor.

He proved himself to be no mean foe for Nick, and the twain staggered furiously around the room before the detective could gain a complete mastery.

Even then, at the moment when the counterfeiter's arms were pinioned by his sides, so he could not longer resist his assailant, he struck out madly with one foot.

The toe of his boot hit an iron in the floor, and the movement was followed by a dull click.

The next instant Nick felt the door falling away beneath him.

He tried to spring aside, as a dark pit yawned at his feet, but, before he could free himself from the outlaw, both were carried downward at a tremendous rate.

The fall was eight or ten feet, and the twain struck in a heap on an earthen surface.

Nick had gone first in such a way that the force of Swazey's body was largely upon him, so that he got the worst of the tumble.

The outlaw was quick to rally.

A faint stream of light struggled down into the gloomy pit, lending a weirdness to the hand-to-hand combat.

With an oath Swazey tried to clutch Nick's throat, but the arm of the Little Giant was longer and quicker.

Swazey received a blow behind the ear which sent him reeling backward, and, before he could recover, Nick had overpowered him.

"Who in Satan's name are you?" demanded the defeated counterfeiter, as he found himself bound hands and feet.

"If it will afford you any satisfaction, I am willing you should know.

"I am Nick Carter."

"Great Scott! It can't be so. Cash Brazen said he would look after you."

"Then he wants to attend to his duty better. Let me drag you to the light. You may believe your eyes, if you cannot my voice."

Nick then pulled Swazey along, until they were both under the rays of the light.

He then removed enough of his disguise for the captive counterfeiter to see his face.

Bill Swazey looked, and a ghastly pallor came over his face as he exclaimed:

"My God! 'tis true. We are undone. Somebody has betrayed us."

"Your own work, Bill Swazey; yours and your companion's. Only Cash Brazen is left, and he shall be in the hands of the law before the rising of another sun. Joe Brockway is dead. Turner and that other Brazen, Cash's

twin brother, lie at this moment in Ludlow street jail."

"Have you found out the deacon's scheme?"

"Every part of it."

"How did you know me?"

"By your violin. You play 'Dan Tucker' like an——"

"I was a fool! I ought to have looked through your disguise. It is too late now. What are you going to do with me?"

"Answer me two questions, and I will tell you."

"What are they?"

"Who goes to the tomb with Cash Brazen?"

"I do."

"Disguised as his wife?"

"Yes. I might as well make a clean breast of it. Cash Brazen sha'n't escape if I don't!"

Before Nick could say more, the sound of carriage wheels were heard outside the house.

Swazey uttered a low chuckle as he exclaimed:

"Cash is coming! Your jig is up, Nick Carter. Hel——"

Nick's hand was instantly over the outlaw's mouth, and the next moment he slipped a gag into it.

Glancing hastily around him, Nick saw but one way of escape, and that was by the trap-door.

The wagon wheels sounded plainer. The team was stopping in front of the door.

It would never do for the counterfeiter chief to enter the house, to find that trap open.

With the agility of a cat Nick leaped upward.

Catching hold upon the edge of the floor, he drew his weight rapidly upward, until he had gained the room.

By the sounds he knew that the party was alighting from the carriage.

Brushing the dust and dirt which he had brought upon the floor back into the abyss, he swiftly raised the trap-door and slipped the bolt into its socket.

At that moment two or three persons stepped upon the piazza.

Dextrously adjusting his disarranged disguise, he sank into the nearest chair as the foremost of the new-comers entered the apartment.

CHAPTER VII.

NICK'S GREWSOME MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

As Deacon Honeywell stepped across the threshold a look of terror swept over his countenance, swiftly followed by the demand:

"Who are you in my house?"

"Beg your pardon, podner," said Nick, rising to his feet. "I hope you'll s'cuse me, but I meant no 'fense. I wuz nigh 'bout fagged out, an' an ol' friend told me to rest till you come. He said Deacon Honeywell would turn no poor man away from his door. Be you the deacon?"

"Where's Jimson?" asked Deacon Honeywell, unheeding the tramp's question.

"He wuz thet tired he's gone to bed. He knew everything would be safe with me round."

The farmer scowled at this remark, casting a hurried glance about the apartment.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Bob Ballard. I wuz lookin' fer a job o' wuk. My friend Jimson said you would

want me to help you. I am handy at anything."

"Did you ride up here with Saul Wright?"

"Dunno, deacon, honor bright. You see, I'm a stranger in these parts."

"Was he a red-headed youngster? Drove a sorrel horse?"

"C'rect, deacon; couldn't told it straighter myself."

"I expected it from what he said. Well, that settles your fate. I couldn't think of hiring a man to help me who came to me with a red-headed boy. I am not superstitious, but I have a mortal dread for red-headed folks. I——"

"Oh, dear me, deacon! surely you ain't goin' to turn me out into the cold world! Such a kind-hearted man as you are, too. I know your kindly nature will not turn against me. They have told such lovin' stories of you."

Once more the torn bank-note was brought into action and displayed prominently in Nick's hand.

The great detective saw the eyes of the so-called deacon Honeywell fixed upon it, and instantly there was a change in the latter's demeanor—a change Nick was quick to note.

The man he knew to be Cash Brazen made no allusion to the token, however, but, after considering a moment, said, in a pleasanter tone than he had hitherto employed:

"You can stop until morning. Then we will discuss any business you may have with me," with a decided emphasis on the word business. "Here, John, show Mr.—the gentleman to the east chamber."

Bidding his host "good-night," Nick followed the hired man up the stairs.

The torn bank-note had certainly proved a talisman thus far.

"Where's Jimson sleep?" he asked, as they gained the second floor.

"In that room there."

"This one?"

"No. That belongs to the deacon's crazy wife."

"I have heard of her. Ever see her?"

"No, 'cepting a few times when she was starting off with the deacon to visit the tomb at dead of night."

"Sho! must be a strange practice, mister."

"So 'tis. But the body of their little boy that died, and was embalmed, is there. It is a whim of hers to visit the place, and the deacon is an uncommonly kind-hearted man, so he humors her. Not many men would do it."

"Why does she want to go at night?"

"Boy died at that time, I believe. You never hear anything of her at day-time, but sometimes at night she screams for hours together. Too bad! They say she was a very beautiful woman; but here you are at your room. Hope you will rest well, sir. Hope Mrs. Honeywell's cries won't disturb you."

Nick saw that the room assigned to him was small and poorly furnished, and at the extreme corner of the house.

"Well," he mused, as he sank into the only chair, "Deacon Honeywell, the crisis is close at hand."

Nick's first move was to see that the door could be locked.

Assured of this, he turned the key in the lock, from the outside, and started toward the room supposed to be occupied by the man known as Jimson, *alias* Bill Swazey.

He found the door of the latter room unlocked, and with the key on the inside.

This apartment was better furnished than the one he had left, and showed signs of recent occupancy.

Taking the precaution to lock the door, Nick then began the exploration of the place, to find, as he had expected, communication leading to the room claimed to belong to the deacon's crazy wife.

"Such a person evidently exists only in story," he thought. "My next move, then, is to gain an entrance to the place."

This door proved to be locked so securely that the detective had to work some time before he could effect an entrance.

As he had expected, the apartment was untenanted, though there was a woman's wardrobe thrown over one of the chairs, and there were pieces of clothes scattered about belonging to the imaginary person.

"I suppose I must dress in readiness for the deacon's coming," and he began to invest himself in the cast-off garments, which showed by their size that the supposed lunatic possessed no slight figure.

Finding a kerosene lamp in the room, Nick did not hesitate to light it, knowing that Swazey must have been in the habit of doing so.

Thus he had no difficulty in arranging his disguise, while he had plenty of time, as it was fully an hour later before a low knock at the door announced that the time for action had come.

Nick answered the summons by a low thump from the inside, following which Deacon Honeywell's oily tone said:

"Ready?"

Nick noiselessly opened the door, and stepped out into the hall.

"It took the men a confounded while to get off to bed," declared the deacon; "but the way is clear now.

"Won't you take my arm, Mary?" he added, speaking in a louder key.

Nick silently obeyed, and when they had reached the outside of the house he saw that a horse hitched to a covered carriage was standing near by, while one of the hired men was waiting a few steps away.

"I shall try and get back shortly," said the deacon to the latter, "so you remain up to care for the horse."

The next moment Nick and his strangely mated companion were riding slowly down the road.

The horse was evidently used to these nocturnal journeys, for it jogged along without any guidance on the part of its driver.

As they rode out of the broad yard, the shrill shirrup of an August cricket came from the neighboring hedge.

"How I do hate the sound of those creatures!" exclaimed the deacon, snatching the whip from the socket and giving the horse a smart blow.

"Chick is on hand," thought Nick. "He will look after affairs at the house."

"Say, Bill," said Nick's companion, in a low tone. "I'm about tired of these midnight trips, though they have answered us a good purpose."

"How much longer have we got to keep them up, now that Turner is secure?" asked the disguised detective.

"Not long. I instructed Devoll to put

Turner out of the way as soon as possible. He has done it before this time, if the fool has not already worn himself out. The idea of a man's weakening at the very moment of success."

"We shall never find a better engraver."

"Right you are; and he ought to have been, working for the Government as long as he had. But we are risking too much by this talk. Better wait till we get there.

"I seem to be uncommonly nervous to-night. Just the chirping of that cricket unhinged my nerves. I hate myself for it.

"By the way, who do you suppose that queer-looking individual was who came to the house to-night?"

"Haven't an idea. He had the torn bank-bill, though."

"Yes. Did he show it to you, too? Probably some greenhorn who wants some of the queer. My brother must have given him that bank-note. Well, we'll find out about him in the morning."

Nothing further was said until the cemetery gate was passed, and they rode along the well-worn path leading to what seemed the private vault of a family.

It was light enough for Nick to see the name of Honeywell on the granite front, while a weeping willow was growing on either side.

The plot was near the centre of the grounds, so the white head-stones and monuments loomed all about them, looking in the pale moonlight not unlike so many spectral watchers over these sacred domains.

Nick remained in the carriage while the counterfeiter tied the horse to a convenient post, where the animal had stood so many

times before that it had hollowed out an excavation under its fore feet.

Then, carrying out the farce to its minutest detail, so a chance observer could not have seen anything wrong, Deacon Honeywell stepped back to the side of the carriage and politely assisted the veiled figure to alight.

Producing a heavy key, he inserted it into the lock, and when he had turned it slightly he followed it with another, and that with still another, and the third with a fourth, before the massive lock yielded.

"It is a case of safe bind," thought Nick, as at last the iron door swung noiselessly in on its well-oiled hinges, and he preceded the other into the pitchy darkness of the tomb.

"Safe here once more!" exclaimed the counterfeiter chief, as he closed the door behind him and fastened it.

"Now for a light. I never dare breathe fully till I am safely here. Ah, Bill! who dreams of our secret here?"

"Wasn't it a shrewd plan? And now our harvest is near at hand."

"You are sure they are going?" asked Nick, still imitating the voice of Swazey.

"How can they fail? Such imitations were never put on the market. To show you how easily they go, I will tell you that we caught a sucker this very day just as easy as hooking pouts.

"He proved to be that fellow who was advertising for a scheme, which I answered. Luck brought him right into our clutches. Devoll had barely got home, so I met him at the door of our city residence. I had to leave before we had fairly hooked him, but you can trust my brother to close the grip."

"You bet!" replied Nick, laconically. "Did he draw deep?"

"Didn't I tell you I came away before the deal was completed?"

"As there is nothing to do but to see that everything is all right, you can remain here at the door, while I go down into the work-room. I will be back in a moment."

"It always gives me the shivers to stay here alone," said Nick. "I forgot my knife, too, and I would like to get it. There is no need of my staying here."

Before this time his companion had succeeded in lighting a torch, the flickering light of which threw a weird glamour over the underground scene.

Nick saw several coffins standing in a row on shelves on the sides of the cavern-like retreat, though he imagined they were empty.

Cash Brazen showed in his every movement that he was a careful schemer.

In its rock walls and flagstone bottom there was nothing to betray it other than a common receptacle of the dead.

"Come along, if you wish," said the deacon, passing down to the farther end of the vault, when, pressing smartly on a spot near the centre of the wall, a slab of granite moved swiftly and silently on its well-oiled pivots, revealing a dark passage beyond.

Into this the deacon led the way, followed closely by Nick.

Carrying the torch in one hand so its dim blaze lighted their pathway ahead, the counterfeiter chief continued on the winding course underground.

Every particular was noted by Nick as he passed along the passage.

In a short time they reached the end of the passage, which opened into a large room, where Nick quickly saw the work of the gang had been done.

No one was there now, for the manufacture of the spurious money had been mainly carried to completion.

On one side was a pile of imitation silk fibre paper, such as is used by the Government in printing its issue of paper money.

"The monument that Brockway left," said Nick's companion, pointing to the bogus paper. "It will come handy by and by, though it does not look so we might need more very soon with a million dollars worth of printed sheets on hand."

"Are you sure that Joe is dead?" asked Nick.

"Sure? Are you sure you have a right hand?" demanded the other. "I believe I had a hand in that!" and his lips parted, showing the rows of gleaming ivory between the discolored mustache and beard, and the gold tooth that had betrayed him shone more conspicuously than ever.

Near by the paper was a full set of plates that had evidently been the work of Turner.

Besides the plates for the ten-dollar Treasury note already seen there were those for a twenty-dollar gold certificate, as finely executed as the others, and also a perfect series of plates for a ten-dollar bank-note on the Mystic River National Bank of Mystic, Conn.

"It takes a magnifying glass to detect the error in them," declared the chief. "Turner was a good one, and I hated to part with him."

"Is there anything new in that young Smart's case?" asked Nick.

"No; only the fool has got into a web that he won't get clear of in a hurry. The officials think they did a shrewd thing! Bah! I like to laugh at them in my sleeve."

"To be serious, however, I would like to get hold of that box Smart had when they captured him. Not that it is likely to work us any harm, but Devoll, the careless fool! must have dropped his section of that bank-note in with the queer. At any rate, he has lost it."

"Brockway's has not been found, either, has it?"

"No. I think we shall have to drop the whole scheme, and adopt a new signal."

"I think it will be best; and if you have no objections, I would like to propose the new token."

"I am willing. We will talk it over as soon as we get back to the house."

"I'm agreed."

In addition to the plates and paper, Nick saw the presses, inks, chemicals, silk floss, in fact, everything that belongs to a complete counterfeiter's outfit, such as had never been produced in this country before.

Not alone was there all this paraphernalia for making spurious money, but the identical article itself was stacked up in tiers.

"What would Uncle Sam give to get his august eye on this pile?" exclaimed the pretended deacon.

"Or Nick Carter, even," said the great detective, boldly, still imitating, so faithfully as to deceive the sharp counterfeiter, the voice of Bill Swazey.

"Ay, Nick Carter, too! But why did you mention him?"

"Oh! he happened to be in my mind, I suppose."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

"Everything is all right here; let's return to the house as soon as possible.

"I am dry as a fish, and while we drink we will talk over a disposition and division of the spoils.

"Devoll will be along to-morrow."

Nothing loath now, Nick assented to leaving the dismal place, with its dark secrets.

He had seen enough of the counterfeiters' headquarters.

Every part proved the cunning of its promoter, Cash Brazen.

It hardly seemed possible that the man beside him was the far-seeing outlaw for whose apprehension the United States Government was offering such big rewards.

In silence the villain led the way back to the entrance.

"Hold the torch, Bill, while I undo this lock. It has bothered me the last few times."

Nick took the torch.

Instead of holding it in his hand, however, he stuck it in a crevice in the rocky wall.

Cash Brazen paid no heed to this, as he continued to manipulate the refractory lock.

Neither did he see Nick Carter drawing gradually closer to him.

The sharp click of the key, as it turned on its pivot, rang out distinctly on the deep silence of the scene, and, half turning his head, the doomed man disclosed that mocking, cruel smile so common to him.

Before he could speak, Nick sprang upon him.

Cash Brazen was a powerful man, and, though taken by surprise, in an instant he was exerting all his strength.

The tussle was severe, but would undoubtedly have been in Nick's favor, had not one of his feet slipped upon the slimy mold of the floor of the tomb.

He fell heavily to the ground, his head coming in contact with some hard object.

Involuntarily he stretched out his hand, and clutched a short piece of iron, the broken end of a crowbar.

Cash Brazen leaped forward to clutch his fallen foe.

But he was too late.

He saw Nick's uplifted arm, and caught a gleam of the descending bar of iron.

Then, with a faint cry of rage, he sank upon the bottom of the tomb, just as the door swung in, letting in a current of air from the outside world.

The gust of wind extinguished the flickering torch, but it did not affect the result of that lonely scene.

Nick Carter's arm had not failed of its purpose, and he was relieved that it was not found necessary to use a bullet instead of an iron bar.

When Cash Brazen came slowly back to an understanding of his situation, he found himself in his carriage with his captor beside him.

Even in his bewildered state of mind he possessed sufficient of his natural cunning to notice that the tomb door had been closed.

Nick had unhitched the horse, after plac-

ing the unconscious prisoner in the vehicle, and he was now heading the animal toward the house.

"What does this mean?" demanded the outwitted counterfeiter.

"That you are my prisoner, Cassius Brazen. Your game is up."

"Who are you?"

"If it will afford you any consolation, I am willing you should know.

"When I am free from this disguise I am called Nick Carter."

An oath escaped the lips of the other.

"I knew you were no ordinary man to trap me in that way. But how came you here in this way?"

"I came as the tramp."

"Brought by that confounded red-headed boy! I knew he would be the evil genius to bring me my ruin."

"Don't lay too much to him. I had already tracked you down."

"How did you know Deacon Honeywell was my disguise?"

"That gold tooth first betrayed you."

"Curses upon my stupidity! But where is that Swazey? He has flown, the cunning jay."

"Not a bit of it. I was careful to capture him before you arrived. I have all of your gang now; at least all that are living."

"I believe you lie."

Cash Brazen had recovered his usual self-possession.

"Under ordinary circumstances I should resent that speech. But I do not believe in striking a man when he is down."

"You are a sharp one—sharper than I, after all.

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to name those you have captured."

"I can see no objection to that.

"In the first place, Joe Brockway is dead from the effects of blows dealt by your own hands.

"Then, Russell Turner and your twin brother, with the scar on his finger, lie in Ludlow street jail.

"Bill Swazey is up at the house, tied hands and feet."

Another oath, fiercer than the first, left the lips of the defeated outlaw.

"Devoll in your hands?" he added. "How came that? Say, will you answer one more question?"

"A dozen, if you wish."

"Were you that infernal fellow who called at the house in New York?"

"I did pay you the honor of a visit there. Your brother liked my company so well he went away with me."

"The fates have been against us after all. I am too young a man to have been caught like this."

At this moment the horse turned into the door-yard.

Chick came down the steps to meet his friend.

"The man Swazey, whom I have cared for, seems to be all we want of those around the place, except as witnesses at the trial."

"Very well. It has not been a long job."

The following morning the detectives started for New York with their prisoners, having left the tomb as they had found it, safe from intrusion, until the proper authorities could overhaul it.

They saw Curtis Smart at Stamford, and

when he learned the news he declared that he was the happiest man on earth.

"The squire has yielded, and now I will be married in short metre to the best girl on earth!"

In the Ludlow street jail, awaiting that trial which is sure to place them for the balance of their lives behind the bars, lies the king of counterfeiters and his confederates, Cash Brazen, Bill Swazey and Russell Turner.

It is not pleasant to acknowledge that Devoll Brazen is again at liberty.

Such is the case.

Feigning sickness, and then death, he carried out the deception so well as to deceive those who had him in charge, and eventually escaped, thus for a time longer cheating justice of its dues.

But some time and somewhere Nick Carter will find him.

THE END.

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